



Lesson Plan

Southern Society during the Civil War: Black Society

Grades

4, 5, 6

Subjects

Language Arts, Tennessee History

Time Allotted

45 minutes

Setting

Classroom

Group size

Class for discussion, smaller groups for activities

Skills

Cooperation, organization, planning, writing, developing a sense of audience, following directions, research

Methods

Students will research and discuss the societal changes brought about by the Civil War on different parts of southern society (one of a set of three lesson plans.) This lesson will focus on black society.

Materials

Reading material for research, videos, and storytelling

Objectives

At the end of the activity, students will be able to:

- *Analyze the changes in black family life.*
- *List characteristics of life in three categories; pre-war, war, post-war.*
- *Compare and contrast life as a slave before the war, life during the war, and life as a free black person after the war.*



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Pre-War: The institution of slavery was a primary feature of Southern society in the years before the Civil War. Many people accepted the concept of racial inequality. Slavery fulfilled a critical economic role in Tennessee and in the South. On the huge plantations, the slaves did the heavy work, and the plantation owners benefited from the work of their slaves for their own individual profit.

The conditions of life for the slaves varied from plantation to plantation, largely depending on the personality of the plantation owner. In some cases, slaves had good relationships with their masters and were often treated as members of the family. In other situations, slaves were badly treated. But in either case, the slaves shared one common condition: they belonged to another person.

Although some slave owners felt sure that their slaves were happy, and that if given an opportunity to leave, would remain with their owners, this was not the case. Most slaves were not content in their situation and chose to react both passively and actively. Acts of passive resistance would include activities such as slowing down while working or feigning illness. Slaves reacted actively by running away or forming slave rebellions that were often violent. Slave punishment was often very violent as well, consisting primarily of floggings and severe beatings.

Just as the individual conditions varied, feelings about slavery within the state of Tennessee varied as well. In West and Middle Tennessee, slavery was a strong institution, but in East Tennessee the numbers of slaves were minimal and an anti-slavery movement was strong. Thus the state of Tennessee was very divided politically and socially due to the slavery issue on the eve of the Civil War.

War: During the years of the Civil War, the institution of slavery changed dramatically. Many slaves ran to Union forces seeking protection, joined the Union forces as soldiers, or exhibited their freedom by refusing to work and treating their owners with insolence and disrespect. Other slaves continued to live their lives as they had done before the federal army came through their area, choosing to wait until the war was over and their emancipation declared before attempting to change their lives. Slaves generally declared themselves free when the Federals came through their area. Many owners were shocked to discover that their slaves did in fact wish to leave them when given the choice. Slaves who joined the Confederate forces had a difficult time. Slaves who joined Union forces also were not treated as well as might be imagined. They were discriminated against and in at least one instance were fired upon by their own soldiers. Since Middle Tennessee had Union forces occupying the area, most of the slaves in Tennessee freed themselves as the forces came through the area.

Post-War: Life after the Civil War continued to be very difficult for former slaves. Although they had their freedom, many blacks found it hard to get jobs and get established in their own households. As black workers tried to make a new life for themselves, they were frequently mistreated and taken advantage of. Many blacks traveled to the north looking for a better way of life, while others remained in the south and adapted to the new conditions there.

ACTIVITIES

- Discuss life as it was for slaves before, during, and after the Civil War.
- Share stories, videos, reading material, research black society.
- Prepare charts indicating differences in the three time periods.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

- Research a real slave's life during these three periods.
- Write a story about a fictional slave family during these years incorporating chart information.

RESOURCES

Wiley, Bell Irvin. *Plain People of the Confederacy*. Chicago, IL, Quadrangle Books, 1963.

Rable, George C. *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism*. Urbana, IL, University of Illinois Press, 1989.

Clinton, Catherine. *Life in Civil War America*. National Parks Civil War Series, Eastern National. 1995.

Ash, Stephen V. *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 1860-1870*. Baton Rouge, LA, Louisiana State University Press, 1988.

SUGGESTED READINGS AND VIDEOS

Burns, Bree. *Harriet Tubman*, Chelsea House Publishers, 1992.

Gladstone, William A. *United States Colored Troops: 1863-1867*. Gettysburg, PA, Thomas Publications, 1990.

Macht, Norman. *Sojourner Truth: Crusader for Civil Rights*. Chelsea House Publishers, 1988.

Russell, Sharman. *Fredrick Douglass*. Chelsea House Publishers, 1992.